

789/33
ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT,

A POEM.

BY

THE REV. WILLIAM LISLE BOWLES.



SALISBURY:

PRINTED BY E. G. COLLINS, FOR T. ADAMS, SHAFESBURY; AND SOLD BY DILLY,
LONDON, AND ALL OTHER BOOKSELLERS.

—♦—
1798.



ACI

TO
THE RIGHT HON. LORD SOMMERS,

BARON OF EVESHAM,

THIS

Small Poem

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS MUCH OBLIGED AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

The Author.

THE RIGHT HON. LORD SOMERSET

Baron of Somers

General Esq.

IS RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED

TO ATTEND THE COURT OF COMMONS

On Monday

ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT.

—
A POEM.
—

WHILE Summer airs scarce breathe along the tide,
Oft pausing, up the Mountain's craggy fide
We climb:—how beautiful, how still, how clear,
The scenes that stretch around!—the rocks that rear
Their shapes, in rich fantastic colours drest;
The hill-tops, where the softest shadows rest;
The long-retiring bay; the level sand;
The fading sea-line, and the farthest land
That seems, as faint it lessens from the eye,
To steal away, beneath the cloudless sky!

BUT yesterday, the misty morn was spread
In dreariness on the bleak mountain's head;
No glittering prospect from the upland smil'd;
The driving squall came dark, the sea heav'd wild,

B

And

And lost and lonely, the way-farer sigh'd,
 Wet with the hoar spray of the flashing tide!
 How chang'd is now the circling scene! the deep
 Stirs not; the glancing roofs and white tow'rs peep
 Along the margin of the lucid bay;
 The sails, descried far in the offing grey,
 Hang motionless, and the pale headland's height
 Is touch'd as with sweet gleams of fairy light!

Oh! live there on earth's busy-stirring scene
 Whom nature's tranquil charms, her airs serene,
 Her seas, her skies, her sun-beams, fail to move
 With stealing tenderness, and grateful love?
 Go, thankless man, to misery's cave: behold
 Captivity, stretch'd in her dungeon cold;
 Or think on those, who in yon dreary mine,
 * Sunk fathoms deep beneath the rolling brine
 From year to year, amid the lurid shade,
 O'er-wearied, ply their melancholy trade,

* A Mine, called the Wherry-Mine beneath the surface of the sea, near Penzance:

That

That thou may'st bless the glorious sun, and hail
Him, who with beauty cloath'd the hill and vale;
Who bent the arch of the high heav'ns for thee,
And stretch'd in amplitude the broad blue sea.

Now hark are all its murmurs! and the air
But moves by fits the bents, that, here and there,
Upshoot in casual spots of faded green:
Here straggling sheep the scanty pasture glean—
Or, on the jutting fragments that impend,
Stray fearlessly, and gaze, as we ascend.

MOUNTAIN!* no pomp of waving woods hast thou,
That deck with varied shade thy hoary brow;
No sunny meadows at thy feet are spread,
No streamlets sparkle o'er their pebbly bed:

* Three or four sheep were seen rambling among the precipices, and picking here and there a blade of grass; but in general the Rock, is naked, and extremely steep and craggy.

But thou canst boast thy beauties ; ample views
That catch the rapt eye of the pausing Muse ;
Headlands around new-lighted ; sails, and seas
Now glassy-smooth, now wrinkling to the breeze—
And when the drizzly Winter, wrapt in fleet,
Goes by, and winds and rain thy ramparts beat,
Fancy can see thee standing thus aloof,
And frowning, bleak, and bare, and tempest-proof,
Look down, as in stern confidence, and brave
The howling hurricane, the dashing wave ;
More graceful, when the storm's dark vapours frown,
Than when the summer suns in all their pomp go down !

AND such is he, who, clad in homely weeds,
And boasting little more than Nature needs,
Can wrap him in contentedness, and wear
A port unchang'd, in seasons rude or fair.
His may be Fancy's sunshine ; and the Muse
May deck his visions with her fairest hues,

And

And he may lift his honest front, and say
To the hard storm, that rends his locks of grey,
" I heed thee not ;" He unappall'd may stand
Beneath the cloud that shades a sinking land,
(When, heedless of the storm that onward sweeps,
Mad impious Riot his loud wassal keeps)
Pre-eminent in native worth ; nor bend,
Tho' gathering ills on his bare head descend :
And when the wasteful storm sweeps o'er its prey,
And rends the kingdoms of the world away,
He, firm as stands the Rock's unshaken base,
Yet panting for a surer resting-place,
The human hurricane unmov'd can see,
And say, " O God, my refuge is in Thee !"

STATES, anchored deep, that far their shadow cast,
Rock, and are scatter'd by the Almighty's blast!
As when, awaken'd from his horrid sleep,
In fiery caves, a thousand fathoms deep,
The Earthquake's Dæmon hies aloft,—he waits,
Awhile, by some renowned city's gates,

As

As lift'ning to the mingled shouts and din
Of the mad crowd that feast or dance within ;
Meantime sad Nature feels his sway,—the wave
Heaves, and low sounds moan thro' the Mountain cave,
Then all at once is still :—still as Mid-Night,
When not the lime-leaf moves.—O, piteous sight !
For now the glittering domes crash from on high—
And hark ! a strange and lamentable cry—
It ceases—and the tide's departing roar
Alone is heard upon the desert shore,
That, as it sweeps, with slow huge swell, away,
Remorseless mutters o'er its buried prey.

So Ruin hurrieth o'er this shaken ball—
He lifts his mighty mace, and lo ! they fall,
A Carthage or a Rome :—then rolls the tide
Of deep Forgetfulness, whelming the pride
Of man, his shatter'd and forsaken bow'rs,
His noiseless cities, and his prostrate tow'rs !
Some columns, eminent and awful, stand,
Like Ægypt's pillars on the lonely sand ;

We

We read upon their base, inscrib'd by Fame,
 An Homer's here, or here a Shakespeare's name,
 Yet think not of the surge, that soon may sweep
 Ourselves unnumber'd to th' oblivious Deep.

*THE time has been, as mould'ring legends say,
 When all yon Western tract, and this bright bay,
 (Where now the sunshine sleeps, and wheeling white
 The sea-mew circles in fantastic flight)
 Was peopled wide; but the loud storm hath rav'd
 Where its green top the high wood whispering wav'd,
 And many a year the slowly-rising flood
 Rak'd, where the Druids uncouth altar stood.—
 Thou only, aged Mountain! dost remain,
 Stern monument amidst the delug'd plain;
 And fruitless the big waves thy bulwarks beat—
 The big waves flow retire, and murmur at thy feet†:

* Tradition reports, that the Rock was anciently connected by a large tract of land with the Isles of Scilly, and that the whole space between was inundated by an incursion of the sea.

† It is only at high tide the Rock is entirely surrounded by the sea: at low-water it is accessible by land.

THOU,

THOU, half-encircled by the reflux tide,
 As if thy state its utmost rage defied,
 Dost tow'r above the scene as in thine ancient pride. }

MOUNTAIN! the curious Muse might love to gaze
 On the dim record of thy early days,
 Oft fanc'ing that she heard, like the low blast,
 The sounds of mighty generations past.—
 THEE the Phœnician, as remote he sail'd
 Along the unknown coast, exulting hail'd,
 And when he saw thy rocky point aspire,
 Thought on his native shores of Aradus or Tyre!
 Distain'd with many a ghastly giant's blood,
 Upon thy height huge *Corineus stood,
 And clash'd his shield; whilst, hid in caves profound,
 His monstrous foe cower'd at the fearful sound.—
 Hark to the brazen clarions' pealing swell!
 The shout, at intervals, the deep'ning yell!

* One of the supposed followers of Brutus, to whom Cornwall was allotted; "The rather by him lik'd," says MILTON, "for that the hugest giants in rocks and caves were said to lurk there, which kind of monsters to deal with was his old exercise."

Long ages speed away, yet now again
The noise of battle *hurtles on the plain!*
Behold the painted warriors!—down thy side,
O Mountain! sternly-terrible, they stride!
E'en now, impatient for the promis'd war,
*They rear their axes huge, and shouting, cry to Thor!

THE sounds of conflict cease—at dead of night
A voice is heard, “prepare the Druid rite;”—
And hark! the bard upon thy summit rings
The deep chords of his thrilling harp, and sings
To Night's pale Queen, that thro' the Heavens wide,
Amidst her still host list'ning, seems to ride!
Slow sinks the cadence of the solemn lay,
And all the fomb'rous scen'ry steals away,—
The shadowy Druid throng, the darksome wood,
And the hoar altar, wet with human blood.

* At the bottom of this mountain, as they were digging for tin, they found spear-heads, axes, &c. (CAMDEN.)

MARK'D ye the Angel-spectre that appear'd?—
By other hands the *holy fane is rear'd,
High on the point, where, gazing o'er the flood,
Confess'd the glitt'ring Apparition stood—
And now, far off, upon his watch of night,
The mariner fees the tall window's light,
Or homeward bound, hears on the twilight bay
The slowly-chanted vespers die away!

THESE scenes are fled and pass'd, yet still sublime,
And wearing graceful the grey tints of Time,
Upon the steep Rock's craggy eminence
Th' embattled Castle sits, surveying thence
The villages that strew the subject plain,
And the long winding of the lucid main;
Meantime the stranger marks its turrets high,
And muses on the tale of changeful years gone by!

* A convent built on the top of the Rock, where the apparition of St. Michael was said to have appeared.

BUT

BUT truce to fancies—lo ! our travel ends,
Wide and more wide the arch of Heav'n extends,
And on this top-moſt fragment as we lean,
We feel remov'd from dim earth's diſtant ſcene.
Lift up the hollow trump *, that on the ground
Is caſt, and let it, rolling its long ſound,
Speak to the ſurge below, that we may gain
Tidings from thoſe who traverse the wide main !
Or tread we now ſome ſpot of wizard-land ?
And mark the fable trump, that may command
The brazen doors to fly, and with loud call
Scare the grim Giant in his murky hall !
Hail, ſolitary Caſtle ! that doſt crown
This deſert ſummit, and ſupreme look down
On the long leſſening landscape ſtretch'd below ;
Fearleſs to trace thy inmoſt haunts we go !

WE climb the ſteps :—No warning ſigns are ſent,
No fiery ſhapes flaſh on the battlement !

* A ſpeaking-trumpet lying on the ground.

We enter:—the long chambers, without fear,
We traverse:—No strange echoes meet the ear,
No time-worn tapestry spontaneous shakes,
No spell-bound maiden from her trance awakes,
But Taste's fair hand arrays the peaceful dome—
And hither the domestic virtues come,
Pleas'd, while to this secluded scene* they bear
Sweets that oft wither in a world of care.

CASTLE, no more thou frownest on the main
In the dark terror of thy ancient reign;
No more thy long and dreary halls affright,
Swept by the stoled spirits of the night;
But calm, and heedless of the storms that beat,
Here Elegance and Peace assume their seat;
And when the Night descends, and Ocean roars,
Rocking without upon his darken'd shores,

* The Castle, which belongs to Sir John St. Aubyn, was tenanted by Sir Walter James and Lady.

These vaulted roofs to gentle sounds reply
The voice of social cheer, or song of harmony.*

So fade the modes of life with flow decay,
And various ages various hues display !
Fled are the grimly shadows of Romance,
And pleas'd we see in beauteous troop advance
New arts, new manners, from the gothic gloom
Escap'd, and scattering flow'rs that sweetlier bloom !

REFINEMENT wakes—before her beaming eye
Dispers'd, the fumes of feudal darkness fly,
Like orient morning on the Mountain's head,
A softer light on life's wide scene is shed :
Lapping in bliss the sense of human cares,
MELODY pours forth her ten thousand airs ;
And, like the shades that on the still lake lye,
Of rocks, or fringing woods, or tinted sky,

* This, and the foregoing reflections, were suggested by seeing instruments of music, books, &c. in an apartment, elegantly, but appropriately fitted up.

PAINTING her hues on the clear tablet lays,
 And her own beauteous world with tender touch displays!
 Then SCIENCE lifts her form, august and fair,
 And shakes the night-dews from her glitt'ring hair:
 Meantime rich CULTURE cloaths the living waste,
 And purer patterns of ATHENIAN TASTE
 Invite the eye, and wake the kindling sense;
 And milder MANNERS, as they play, dispense,
 Like tepid airs of Spring, their genial influence.

SUCH is thy boast, REFINEMENT ; but deep dies
 Oft mar the splendor of thy noon-tide skies:
 Then Fancy, sick of follies that deform
 The face of day, and in the sunshine swarm;
 Sick of the fluttering fopp'ries that engage
 The vain pursuits of a degenerate age;
 Sick of smooth Sophistry's insidious cant,
 Or cold Impiety's defying rant;
 Sick of the muling sentiment that sighs
 O'er its dead bird, while Want unpitied cries;

Sick

Sick of the pictures that pale Lust inflame,
And flush the cheek of Love with deep deep shame ;
Would fain the shade of elder days recall,
The gothic battlements, the banner'd hall,
Or list of Elfin harps the fabling rhyme,
Or wrapt in melancholy trance sublime,
Pause o'er the working of some wond'rous tale,
Or bid the Spectres of the Castle hail!—

O MIGHT I now, amid the frowning storm,
Behold, great Vision of the Mount, thy form,
Such and so vast as thou wert seen of yore,
When, looking stedfast to Bayona's shore,
Thou sattest awful on the topmost stone,
Making the Rock thy solitary throne !
For up the narrow steps, winding with pain,
The watch-tow'r's loftiest platform now we gain :
Departed spirit, fruitless is the pray'r,
We see alone thy long deserted chair,*

* On the highest turret of the Castle is a place which is called " St. Michael's Chair."

And

And never more, or in the storm of night,
 Or by the glimm'ring Moon's illusive light,
 Or when the flash, with red and hasty glance,
 Sudden illumes the sea's remote expanse,
 The shores, the cliffs, the mountain, (till again
 Deep darkness closes on the roaring main)
 Shalt thou, dread Angel, with unalter'd mein,
 Sublime upon thy cloudy feat be seen!

YET, musing much on wild tradition's lore,
 And many a phantom tale, believ'd of yore,
 Chiefly rememb'ring the *sweet song (whose strain
 Shall never die) of Him who wept in vain
 "For his lov'd Lycidas," in the wide sea
 Whelm'd, when he cried, great Angel, unto thee,

* Alluding to Milton's Lycidas:—

- "But whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
- "Sleepst by the fable of Bellerus old,
- "Or where the *vision* of the guarded Mount
- "Looks to Namanco's and Bayona's hold,
- "Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth.

LYCIDAS—See Warton's excellent Note on the passage—
Warton's Milton.

The

The fabled scene of thy renown we trace,
And hail with thronging thoughts thy hallow'd resting-
place!

THE stealing Morn goes out—here let us end
Fitliest our song, and to the shore descend.

* YET once more, azure Ocean, and once more,
Ye lighted Headlands, and thou stretching shore,
Down on the beauties of your scenes, we cast
A tender look, the longest and the last!

AMID the arch of Heav'n, extended clear,
Scarce the thin frecks of feathery clouds appear!
Beyond the long curve of the lessening bay
The still Atlantic stretches its bright way,—
The tall ship moves not on the tranquil brine!
Around, the solemn promontories shine!

* " Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
" Ye myrtles brown," &c.

LYCIDAS.

D

No

No sounds approach us, save, at times, the cry
 Of the grey gull, that scarce is heard so high!
 The billows make no noise, and on the breast
 Of charmed Ocean, Silence sinks to rest!*

O MIGHT we thus from Heav'n's bright battlements
 Behold the scene Humanity presents;
 And see, like this, all harmonis'd and still,
 And hear no far-off sounds of earthly ill;
 Wide landscape of the world, in purest light
 Array'd—how fair, how chearing were the sight!

* "A narrow stone stair case in one of the angles leads to the top of the tower. The prospect hence is of so grand a kind as to defy description, and is perhaps as striking as any that can occur to "mortal eye," at the same height. The immense extent of sea which it exhibits raises the most sublime emotions; the waves of the British, Irish, and Atlantic seas all roll within the compass of the sight, and the union of the two latter is interrupted only by the bold eminences about the Land's-end. More under the feet Penzance is distinctly seen—the scaffolding of the famous Wherry-mine—and the hills eastward of the bay uniting into a long rocky ridge."

Maton's Observations on the Western Counties.

ALAS!

ALAS! we think upon this feat of care,
And ask if peace, if harmony be there.
We hear the clangors and the cries, that shake
The mad world, and their dismal music make!
We see gaunt Vice, of dread enormous size,
That fearless in the broad day fweltering lies,
And scorns the feeble arrow that affails
His Heav'n-defying crest, and iron scales!—
His brows with wan and wither'd roses crown'd,
And reeling to the pipe's lascivious found,
We see Intemperance his goblet quaff;
And mocking Blasphemy, with mad loud laugh,
Acting before high Heav'n a direr part,
Sport with the weapons that shall pierce his heart!

IF o'er the * southern wave we turn our sight,
More dismal shapes of hideous woe affright!

* Alluding to the cruelties committed in France. Every English heart must rejoice at the open, manly manner in which Mr. Sheridan avowed his sentiments upon this subject in the House of Commons, April 20, 1798.

Grim-

* Grim-visag'd War, that ruthlefs as he hies,
Drowns with his trumpet's blast a brother's cries,
And Maffacre, by yelling furies led,
With ghastly grin, and eye-balls rolling red !
O'er a vast field wide heap'd with festering flain,
Hark how the Dæmon Paffions shout amain,
And cry, exulting, while the death-ftorm low'rs,
“ Hurrah, the kingdoms of the world are ours !”

O GOD, who madest man, I fee these things,
And wearied, wish for a fleet Angels wings,
That I might fly away—and hear no more,
The furge that moans along this mortal shore !”
But Joy's unclouded funshine may not be,
Till, Father of all Worlds, we rest with Thee !
Then Truth, uplifting from thy works the pall,
Shall speak, “ in wisdom hast thou made them all ;”

* “ Grim-visag'd war.”

SHAKESPEARE.

Then

Then Angels, and Arch-angels, as they gaze,
And all th' acclaiming host of Heav'n, shall raise
The loud Hosannah of eternal praise!

}

HERE all is mixt with sorrow—and the clouds
Hang awfully, whose shade the dim earth shrouds—
Therefore I mourn for man, and fighting, say,
As down the steep I wind my home-ward way,
“O, when will Earth's long-muttering tempests cease,
“And all be sunshine, like this scene, and Peace.”





ERRATA.

- Page 6.—For *live*, read *lives* there, &c.
- Page 9.—For “When heedless of the storm, &c.”
Read “*While* heedless of the storm, &c.”
- Page 13.—For “Behold the painted warriors, &c.”
Read “Behold the *dark-hair’d* warriors, &c.”
- Page 14.—For “And now far off, upon his watch of night,
“The mariner, &c.”
Read “And now the sailor, on his watch of night,
“Sees, like a glimm’ring star, the far-off light.”
- Page 15.—For “But truce to fancies—lo! our travels end,”
Read “*Of this no more*—lo! *here* our journey ends.”
- Page 17.—For “Melody pours forth her ten thousand airs,”
Read “Melody pours forth her *winding* airs.” *
- Page 18.—*Note to* “Sick of the muling sentiment that sighs
“O’er its dead bird,† &c.”

* Add as a *Note*—“Like the songs of morning birds.”

† Alluding to such pathetic histories as that of a dead canary bird, in a recent publication.

Quis talia fando,

Temperet a lacrimis?



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